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SUBJECT: NGO REGISTRATION UPDATE: NOVEMBER 16

REF: MOSCOW 12310

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Federal Registration Service (FRS) has now re-registered 159 foreign NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. We understand FRS has rejected five NGOs, although none appear to be U.S. organizations. The authorities have disseminated draft guidelines governing reporting requirements for NGO community comment. We are hearing NGO concerns, however, about tax filing and visa sponsorship issues that could make operations difficult. We continue to closely track the situation and keep NGO registration concerns high on the agenda with the GOR. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) As of November 10, the FRS had re-registered 159 NGOs. Among them were Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. According to Galina Fokina, acting head of the registration section of the FRS, the applications of 29 organizations still await processing. The FRS has returned another 29 applications for corrections. The FRS has refused re-registration to five NGOs, although Fokina told the press that they are "welcome to re-apply". The FRS seems to be adhering to the requirement that it respond to NGOs within 30 days.

¶3. (SBU) Of the 29 NGOs USAID is tracking, 13 are still awaiting a decision on re-registration. USAID contacts have told us that the FSB visited the International Rescue Committee to discuss the registration process and their programming activities, which raised concerns among the organization's leaders.

¶4. (U) The inter-agency committee responsible for clarifying periodic reporting requirements has disseminated draft guidelines to the NGO community for comment by the end of November.

VISA SUPPORT AND TAX FILING QUANDARIES

¶5. (SBU) As mentioned in reftel, NGOs have told USAID contacts of their concerns that the law's drafters failed to address some of the mundane, yet critical, aspects of running a foreign NGO in Russia. The Registration Chamber previously assisted with visa sponsorship for foreign NGO employees as part of its accreditation responsibilities. With the enactment of the new NGO law, the Chamber no longer has this authority. When AmCham drafted a letter to the Ministry of Justice requesting clarification on the issue, the Ministry responded that it was not within their competence.

¶6. (SBU) According to USAID contacts, another concern NGOs have is connected to tax filings. The FRS' strict attention to transliteration has left some NGOs in the position of

being registered under one spelling with the FRS and another spelling with the tax authorities. Further, the authorities have not yet sorted out the tax status of "sub-unit" offices who are ineligible for re-registration, but must still register individually with local tax authorities.

17. (SBU) COMMENT. We expect the re-registration process to continue over the next few weeks. NGOs that re-submit their documents in a timely manner should be able to resume activities. We were pleased to see engagement with the NGO community on the drafting of reporting guidelines. We will follow up with appropriate authorities on the visa and tax issues and continue to monitor the registration process as it unfolds.
BURNS